

CALIFORNIA NEIGHBORHOODS



SUMMER 2002



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

REDUCING HOMELESSNESS A HIGH PRIORITY FOR STATE AGENCIES

On any given day there are approximately 360,000 people that are homeless in California. While much has been done to relieve homelessness in the past twenty years, the problem persists. It was with this underpinning that the Administration announced a new policy initiative earlier this year involving HCD.

In March of this year an Executive Order was issued and a report on homelessness in California was released. The report, written collaboratively by more than a dozen state agencies, stated that the state should focus in three main areas: integrating programs and services, preventing homelessness among at-risk populations and creating thousands of units of supportive housing. Pursuant to the Executive Order, an Interagency Task Force on Homelessness was created and directed to come back with recommendations in the three areas by July 1, 2002.

A Summit on Homelessness was convened in Sacramento on April 22nd. More than 150 guests met for over three hours discussing what needs to be done to re-

duce homelessness. Nan Roman, of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, told the Summit that government tries to save money by not preventing homelessness but instead spends large amounts of money anyway on homelessness through services, shelter, trips to hospitals, jails, and mental institutions. Other witnesses talked about how making funds more flexible allowed locals to create the housing and services needed for long term homeless persons. At the end of the Summit, SB1227, the \$2.1 billion housing bond, was signed into law for the November ballot.

Since the Summit, more than a dozen agencies and departments have been working to develop recommendations. Director Julie Bornstein and Deputy Director Mike Herald have been active participants in this effort. HCD is principally developing recommendations related to housing production and removing barriers to siting of housing but is also engaged in conversations with many agencies about how to accomplish the goal of substantially reducing the incidence of homelessness in California.

California Department of Housing and Community Development and the California Housing Finance Agency presents:
"STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT: UNLEASHING THE POWER OF PEOPLE AND PLACES"

December 9-10, 2002

Oakland Marriott City Center Hotel
1001 Broadway • Oakland, CA 94607

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- ◆ State of California's housing market
- ◆ Strategies for meeting housing supply and affordability
- ◆ Profiles of successful housing projects
- ◆ Emerging issues such as workforce housing; transit-oriented, infill, mixed use and sustainable development strategies and case studies; and revitalizing strip malls into housing and activity centers

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Both public sector and private stakeholder representatives. Meet key industry players, including elected and appointed officials at the local, state, and federal levels; the housing builder/developer community; non-profit housing providers; housing advocates; housing consultants; lenders/bankers; real estate interests; attorneys; labor groups; manufactured housing industry; and other interest-based coalitions.

REGISTRATION

Registration brochures will be mailed in September 2002. For registration forms and payments received before November 9, the rate is \$175. For payments received after November 9, the rate is \$200.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Rooms will be available at the Marriott Oakland City Center Hotel. The group conference rate has been established at \$110 a night (single/double) plus applicable state and local taxes.

PARTNERS/EXHIBITORS

Partner Exhibitions will showcase new trends relating to housing and community development. Several levels of Partner participation are available. To obtain more information, please call (916) 278-4820. Partner/exhibitor information will be mailed in September.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit our website at www.rce.csus.edu/programs/cts_events.htm or contact us directly at (800) 858-7743. Please refer to the *Strategic Development: Unleashing the Power of People and Places* conference.

Universal Design Benefits All Residents and Visitors

By Ron Javor, Assistant Chief of Housing Standards for the HCD Division of Codes and Standards

For many years, the issue of accessibility in residential building codes was limited to ensuring that some percentage of new multifamily, usually rental, housing being constructed would be accessible to persons with disabilities, and that some portion of the units' interiors would be adaptable to the needs of persons with disabilities.

The California Federation of Independent Living Centers (CFILC) and other housing and disability rights advocates have changed the focus of this issue by asking a few new questions and looking at a broader set of facts. They ask, "When was the last time you had a person with a major disability over to your home for dinner or a social event?" The answer, usually, is "never." Most homes in California lack even basic access amenities, because of one or more external threshold steps, narrow doors and hallways, and other artificial barriers which result in embarrassment or significant discomfort to people with physical disabilities.

CFILC also points out that 97.8% of all housing in this country is designed for the able-bodied, and that nearly 80% of us will be severely incapacitated and require special housing needs at some point in our lifetime. Thus, our homes may exclude not only ourselves or our friends and colleagues with disabilities, but also our parents and other older relations with developing infirmities.

In addition to these conventional concerns, the aging population creates new challenges: Some 33% of Americans already are over the age of 65 and most have physical disabilities or limitations. Often, they need some assistance and have to leave their homes and neighborhoods for, at worst, a nursing home, and, at best, residential assisted living, even though 85% would rather stay in their own homes.

In order to respect those wishes, and reduce costs of alternate site medical care, public agencies are developing policies supporting "aging in place." An integral part of this approach is ensuring that an existing home is, or can be retrofitted for, ease of use and access. With



Every home in a neighborhood would be more welcoming to both residents and visitors using baby carriages, adults with temporary or permanent disabilities, or aging and frail parents or grandparents if access were easier. This new home in Temecula, built incorporating universal design principles, includes an aesthetically-pleasing landscaped grade leading to a zero-step front door entrance.

these lifestyle changes in mind, the rhetoric for home adaptability or modifications has changed from "accessibility" to new terms: "visitability" or "universal design," both of which accommodate the needs of a broader band of our population.

What are we talking about? At a minimum, building a new home with a zero-step entrance costs about \$150 (for grading or special entry areas), wider interior doors about \$50, a few dollars to add blocking in open bathroom walls for future grab bars, and so on. Retrofitting for these would cost a \$1,000 to replace front entrance steps with a ramp, and as much as \$700 to widen an existing doorway. More comprehensive requirements include additional supports and adjustable sinks in bathrooms, wider doorways and continuous floor surfaces, rocker light switches and accessible electrical outlets, and adaptable kitchens.

Continued on page 3



The kitchen in this home incorporates a variety of design features promoting accessibility for all ages and abilities or disabilities, including undercounter access for those using wheelchairs, a sink with a lever handle for easier use, low cabinet storage and, not seen, a side-opening oven, accessible counter microwave unit, pocket doors for cabinets, and movable cabinet shelves.

Historic Investment in Housing 1999-2002

Since 1999, over \$525 million in State funding has been provided for housing programs. So far, this investment has funded 17,500 housing units and is expected to produce another 4,700 by the end of this year, stimulating the economy and creating more jobs.

- New programs have been created to allow lower income families and seniors to become and remain homeowners, adding over \$82 million for innovative and successful homeownership programs. More than 11,500 families have already been served.
- The budget has also provided \$177 million for affordable Multifamily Rental Housing, to help California's workforce and their families obtain safe and stable rental housing where their children can grow and learn. Without an adequate supply of affordable housing for workers, California's businesses cannot expand and prosper. Over \$161 million has already been awarded to produce 4,300 rental housing units.
- The innovative \$24 million Downtown Rebound Program has already begun revitalizing downtown Los Angeles, by reconstructing and adapting vacant or underutilized commercial structures for residential use.
- Over \$64 million in funding has been provided for the Emergency Housing Assistance Program administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development, including \$25 million for the creation of new facilities and the rehabilitation/expansion of existing facilities, and \$45 million for shelter operations.
- Housing for farm workers and farm worker families has increased with over \$70 million provided to construct over 3,900 single-family homes and rental housing units for farm workers.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN *Continued from page 2*

Universal design advocates point out that these changes make good sense—and already often are required—in businesses. Many major companies design products with universal design built-in at initial production instead of having to be added later. Businesses often must provide reasonable accommodations for both employees and the general public. And studies have shown that universal designed homes are attractive to able-bodied homebuyers as well as those with special needs, especially when they consider future uses by themselves or relatives. These homes foster an “inclusive” extended family, rather than excluding family members with disabilities.

There are operational public models in place already. The United Kingdom adopted a new building regulation that took effect in October 1999, fostering visitability for every home including a zero-step entrance, at least a half-bath on the main floor, wide halls and doorways and accessibility switches and outlets. Texas requires all single-family affordable housing constructed after September 1999 with public funding to include a no-step entrance, widened doors,

raised electrical plugs, and reinforced bathroom walls to allow for grab bars. Atlanta was the first U.S. city to mandate a zero-step entrance in certain private single-family homes (over 500 have been constructed under the 1998 ordinance).

California today has over 3 million people with disabilities, and the number is increasing as the population ages. While there is no need, in most cases, for many of the new single-family homes or smaller apartment complexes to meet all accessibility requirements in the California Building Code, a significant number of them should at least offer the option of accessibility before they are built, in order that a family can choose a “full life-cycle home.” Retrofitting to add ramps, redesign bathrooms, and changing front entrances when the need arises creates significant short-term problems and is far more expensive than initial inclusion of universal design components. During the coming months, you will hear new words emerging related to an old problem: “visitability” and “universal design” have become the banners of a number of persons concerned about more than just the affordability and safety of housing.

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